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HAGGIS HUNT**

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LA BELLE ECOSSAISE

By Jim Fleming

Lady Janet Fleming was the daughter of one king; mistress of another; and governess to a queen. Many readers will be familiar with Mary Fleming, the long-time companion of Mary Queen of Scots and one of 'the Four Marys'. However, Mary's mother (though less well known) is equally intriguing.

Born on 17 July 1502, Lady Janet was the illegitimate daughter of King James IV of Scotland and his half second cousin, Agnes Stewart. One of Janet's half-brothers was King James V, her father's only surviving legitimate child.

When she was 6 years old her father married Margaret Tudor, eldest daughter of King Henry VIII of England. Three years later her mother married Adam Hepburn (2nd Earl of Bothwell) and became known as the Countess of Bothwell. She was 11 years old when both her father the king and her stepfather were killed at the Battle of Flodden.

Janet's mother quickly re-married to Alexander 3rd Lord Home whose forces had defeated the English right wing at Flodden before the Scottish army was destroyed. After the battle, he resisted the regency of John Stewart (Duke of Albany) but was captured and executed for rebellion in 1516. Janet's mother married thirdly Robert 5th Lord Maxwell and fourthly Cuthbert Ramsay, a burgess of Edinburgh, who survived her.

When she reached 21 years old in 1523, Janet married Malcolm 3rd Lord Fleming after they had obtained a marriage dispensation from Pope Clement VII "their being within the 3rd degree of affinity". It is not clear why they were deemed to be so closely related, because the only common ancestor that I can identify is their 4G-grandfather King Robert II (making Janet a only a 4th cousin, albeit she had dual descent from King Robert).

Now known as Lady Fleming, she and her husband raised seven daughters and two sons (including the 4th and 5th Lords Fleming) over the next twenty years. Janet was pregnant with their last child when her husband was captured by the English after the Battle of Solway in November 1542. He was released eight months later on payment of a ransom of 1000 merks sterling (666 pounds).

On 14 December 1542 Janet's half-brother King James V died, just six days after the birth of his daughter Mary, so she immediately became Mary Queen of Scots. During her childhood Scotland was governed by regents, first by the heir to the throne (James Hamilton, Earl of Arran) and then by Lady Fleming's mentor, the queen's mother (Mary of Guise).

she could not speak French, nevertheless, she managed very well and was widely admired in the French court as

La Belle Ecossaise

THE BEAUTIFUL SCOTSWOMAN

Even though Edward was the queen's grand-uncle, this could have avoided the bloodshed, intrigue and angst that was to plague Mary's life and lead to her eventual execution. But reactionary Catholic Cardinal Beaton objected vigorously to the prospect of a Scottish monarch marrying a Protestant and browbeat Parliament into rejecting this elegant solution to centuries of war.

Undeterred, King Henry launched a military campaign against Catholic Scotland that was termed "the rough wooing". In 1547 Scottish forces were heavily defeated at the Battle of Pinkie and Janet's husband of 24 years, Malcolm 3rd Lord Fleming, was killed.

Lady Fleming was appointed governess to her infant niece, the queen, soon after her youngest daughter Mary was born. Mary Fleming, one of "the four Marys", would become the queen's closest lifelong companion.

King Henry VIII of England proposed the Treaty of Greenwich whereby the young Queen Mary would marry his son Edward in ten years' time, thus uniting Scotland and England.

King Henry II of France then opportunistically proposed to unite Catholic France and Scotland by marrying the young queen to his three-year-old son, the Dauphin Francis. This met with general agreement, so on 7 August 1548 the queen was moved to France for safety, accompanied by the widowed Lady Fleming and her daughter Mary.

Doubts were expressed about Lady Fleming's suitability to continue as governess because she could not speak French. Nevertheless, she managed very well and was widely admired in the French court as La Belle Ecossaise (the beautiful Scotswoman). She soon attracted the attention of the French King (Henry II), became his mistress and gave birth to his son in 1551. Her boy, called Henri de Valois-Angoulême (1551 – 1586) was the most highly favoured natural son of the King, who later legitimized him and appointed him as Grand Prior of France, Governor of Provence and Admiral of the Levantine Sea.

When the king's wife (Catherine de Medici) discovered his relationship with Lady Fleming, she began scheming to have her removed from the court. Janet was sent back to Scotland and replaced as governess by Françoise de Paroy. Nevertheless, she continued to live the high life. In 1555 the brother-in-law to her widowed daughter Johanna (William Lord Livingstone) provided her son James 4th Lord Fleming a sum of one thousand pounds "for the relief of Lady Fleming, his mother".

Three years later the Scottish Parliament appointed Lord Fleming as one of eight commissioners to go to France to conclude negotiations for the queen's marriage and to observe the nuptials. This was a dangerous assignment because the two sides had different ideas about how the crowns would be united. The Scots intended that Mary would remain Queen of Scotland with the dauphin as her consort. In time the dauphin would ascend the French throne while his wife remained Queen of Scotland. It would only be their future son or daughter who would eventually rule both countries. But the French king envisioned that his son would be co-ruler of Scotland from the day of his marriage to Queen Mary. This was complete anathema to the Scottish Parliament which instructed

the commissioners that they were not to make concessions on this point under any circumstances.

The commissioners' refusal to use their influence to have the Scottish Regalia sent to France so that the dauphin might be crowned king of Scotland gave such offence to the French king that it was strongly suspected that he would retaliate. Lord Fleming made haste to put his affairs in order and, sure enough, three of his co-commissioners died from poison on 28 November 1558 at Dieppe. He hurried back to Paris where he too died three weeks later. King Henry II had clearly ordered his assassination, despite the fact that he was the eldest son of his former mistress, Lady Fleming. Henry himself died seven months later from a jousting injury.

A year later Lady Fleming was one of the ladies-in-waiting who kept a vigil beside the deathbed of the queen's mother, Mary of Guise. Soon afterward she applied to the Privy Council for permission to leave Scotland with her French son Henri, which was granted. She died on 15 February 1562 in London on her way home and is buried at Boghall.



Jim Fleming is a retired Customs Director and lives on Sydney's lower north shore. He began researching his family history in 1983 and has been a member of the Society of Australian Genealogists since then. Aside from genealogy he enjoys travelling and singing baritone in two choirs. He is Secretary and Historian of the Clan Fleming Scottish Society.

e: cfss.historian@gmail.com

www.jimfleming.id.au

THE FLEMING FAMILY

A brief history

The rise and fall of the earldom of Wigtown (first creation)

By Charles Rigg

In the first of four articles on the history of the Fleming family, Charles Rigg looks back to the fourteenth century and the years 1306-1372. This was a period of contrasting fortunes for the Fleming family: from 1306-1341 it was one of spectacular success culminating in Malcolm Fleming, a baron of low to middling status in 1314, becoming earl of Wigtown in 1341. However, following a calamitous defeat on English soil in 1346 the next eleven years were to be as unkind to him as the previous twenty-five had been rewarding. His grandson Thomas succeeded to the title around 1358 but in seeking to find a solution to increasing financial challenges he started to sell off lands and the earldom itself in 1372.

Our starting point however is 1306. It was on 10 February of that year in a Dumfries church that Robert the Bruce and his companions killed John Comyn, a rival to the throne, in what Professor Michael Brown described as the 'defining political act of fourteenth century Scotland'. It merited that statement because 'it precipitated Bruce into seizing the throne' six weeks later and, in doing so, 'altered the whole basis of Scottish opposition to Edward I', the English king. It has been contended in some quarters that one of Bruce's companions on that momentous day was Robert Fleming, father of Malcolm. Tradition has it that after Bruce told his companions waiting outside the church that "I doubt I have slain Comyn", Fleming and others went in to remove any shadow of doubt. On their return, Bruce asked them to confirm that Comyn was dead. Fleming's response was to hold aloft the victim's severed head and replied: "Let the deed show". This became the Fleming family motto.

CFSS Executive Council & High Council Members

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CFSS President
e: cfss.president@gmail.com

Tammy Schakett
CFSS Vice President/Treasurer
e: cfss.treasurer@gmail.com

James Fleming
CFSS Secretary/Historian
e: cfss.historian@gmail.com

Scott Fleming
CFSS Sergeant at Arms
e: cfss.sergeantatarms@gmail.com

David Fleming
CFSS Liaison to Lyons Court/Special Council
e: cfss.liasion-lyons-court@gmail.com

Lauren Bisplinghoff
CFSS Events Coordinator
e: cfss.events@gmail.com

Ian Fleming
CFSS Media Director
e: cfss.mediadirector@gmail.com

General Membership Enquiries
e: cfss.membership@gmail.com



COVER IMAGE

The rampant and armed Lion of Flanders symbolises the Fleming family's ancient origins.

Illustration, design and artwork: Ian Fleming

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